

Lapeer Community Schools

Writing Workshop Components: Conferring

“Children develop language through interaction, not action. They learn to talk by talking to someone who responds. They must learn to write by writing to someone who responds.” --Mem Fox

Definition of Conferring: The key aspect of Writers Workshop. The teacher meets individually with the student to discuss their writing piece. The brief meeting allows the students to explain their writing, ask clarifying questions and the teacher has the opportunity to check for understanding. Based upon student needs, teacher may confer in small flexible groups to provide guided writing opportunities.

Key Elements for Conferring:

- Confer (v): con=together, fer=to bring
- A conference is a conversation, where ideas are brought together.
- There is a specific reason for the conference.
- It is a discussion about how the student is progressing.
- The goal is to identify how the writer can improve in an area of focus.

Different Kinds of Conferences:

- **Content conferences** - Find out the content of the writing and decide that the child needs help developing or elaborating on the content.
- **Expectation conferences** - Observe what the child is doing, find out what the child thinks he is doing, and then redirect the writer.
- **Process and goals conferences** - Learn the process and goals that the child is already using and then teach ways to raise the level or change the process/goal.

Architecture of a Conference with Prompts for Conferring

Based on the Work of Teacher's College Reading and Writing Project Summer Institute, Lucy Calkins, Director

Research

- What are you trying to do as a writer in this piece?
- What have you done so far?
- Is there anything you want me to listen/look for?
- Is there anything I should know before I hear it/look at it?

Compliment

- I can see that you tried . . . (name the strategy)
- This part . . . works. . . because
- I can see that you as a writer (and as a person) care about. . .
- This part. . . makes me think about. . . (connect to larger issues/concepts)

Decide What to Teach

- Based on
 - what student is doing/just about doing
 - strategies you have taught
 - assessments you have done

Teach

- There's a strategy writers use that may be helpful to you as a writer. . .
- There's something I'd like to teach you that writers often do to. . .

Link

- Parting question /comment
 - So, tell me what you are going to do now as a writer on this piece?

So, when I come back in (a few minutes, or tomorrow or next week), I'm going to look for. . .

Roles During Conference Time

Everyone's' Role	Teacher's Role	Student's Role
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Respect the student & teacher who are conferencing• Use the "<u>Ask 3 Before Me</u>" rule.• Expect a brief 5-minute conference.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review the student's writing conference plan.• Listen to the focus passage.• Think about how to help the writer, not just the writing.• Offer positive comments.• Ask open-ended question and converse about the piece to help the child think more deeply.• Provide a few (only a few) instructional comments.• Suggest a craft or strategy you've already taught.• Encourage the student to try something you have suggested.• Make notes and update records.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Come with a writing conference plan in mind.• Read the focus passage aloud.• Share what you like about it.• Identify what you want to work on together, if anything.• Listen to the teacher's comments and suggestions.• Think, plan, and return to your piece.• Attempt to do something you've learned in the conference.

Potential Resources for Conferring:

- Lucy Calkins' units of study
- Irene C. Fountas & Gay Sue Pinnell's *Guiding Readers and Writers- Grades 3-6*
- Marcia Freeman's *Building a Writing Community: A Practical Guide*
- Katie Wood Ray's *What You Know by Heart*
- Ralph Fletcher & JoAnn Portalupi's *Writing Workshop: The Essential Guide*
- Kay Johnson, Kathryn L. Johnson, Pamela V. Westkott's *Writing Like Writers: Guiding Elementary Children Through a Writer's Workshop*

Assessment

Students will be held accountable for their individual work through the informal analysis of application following the conference. Also, anecdotal notes are used to record the strategies/skills worked on with each student. These notes are used to ensure the conferring focus and mini lesson content are all applied to students' daily work.